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## THE SOUTH PACIFIC AGENDA: A FRAMEWORK FOR ASEAN PARTICIPATION

BY

COLONEL YUE YEONG KWAN

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THE SOUTH PACIFIC AGENDA:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR ASEAN PARTICIPATION

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel Yue Yeong Kwan, IN  
International Fellow, Singapore

Colonel James R. Corcoran, FA  
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
31 March 1989

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## ABSTRACT

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International Fellow, Singapore

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT. . . . .	ii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Purpose of Study . . . . .	1
II. RECENT EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS . . . . .	3
Decisions by the South Pacific Forum (SPF)	3
Fishing Agreements . . . . .	3
The SPNFZT . . . . .	4
Rift in the ANZUS Alliance . . . . .	5
French Nuclear Tests . . . . .	5
Military Coup in Fiji. . . . .	6
Independence Movement in New Caledonia . .	7
III. NATIONAL INTERESTS, GOALS AND TRENDS . . .	9
The SPF. . . . .	9
Australia. . . . .	14
United States. . . . .	15
France . . . . .	18
Soviet Union . . . . .	19
China and Japan. . . . .	21
IV. ASEAN PARTICIPATION. . . . .	25
A Political Framework. . . . .	26
Defence and Security Matters . . . . .	28
Economic Development . . . . .	31
A Singapore Contribution . . . . .	33
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	37

THE SOUTH PACIFIC AGENDA:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR ASEAN PARTICIPATION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A series of events in the South Pacific over the past few years have drawn much world attention to a region which had hitherto been an isolated and obscure part of the Pacific rim. As global interest in the region grows and as we approach the "Pacific Century," it is timely for an appraisal to be made of the changes and trends in the region. This will include a brief review of the main developments in order to establish broad patterns of policy of the various countries concerned. An attempt will be made to identify the long-term interests of both the big powers as well as those of the smaller states in the region. The security and economic concerns of the island nations themselves will also be examined. Wherever possible, potential areas of instability and sources of friction will be identified.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

But, more importantly, the main purpose of this study is to propose the contribution that ASEAN, especially Singapore, can make to assist in bringing the South Pacific islands into the mainstream of affairs of the Asia-Pacific region. What can be done, either by the ASEAN countries themselves or collectively with other countries, to ensure that the South Pacific will remain a politically stable and economically viable region? What conditions are necessary to prevent the region from degenerating

into another arena of big power conflict, as so often seen in many parts of the developing Third World?



## CHAPTER II

### RECENT EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

#### DECISIONS BY THE SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM (SPF)

Two major agreements made by the SPF had much impact on recent political developments and had precipitated unprecedented economic and diplomatic friction in the region. The first was the decision in 1982 for the member states of the SPF to declare a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in keeping with the UN Law of the Sea Convention. This initiative was followed by an agreement in 1983 to set up some form of a South Pacific patrol to protect their EEZs from encroachment, specifically by Russian, Japanese and American commercial fishing fleets. The second significant event originated from an idea by the Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke in 1983 to establish a South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone. Following the endorsement by thirteen members of the SPF in August 1985 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZT) or the Treaty of Rarotonga came into effect on December 1, 1986.

#### FISHING AGREEMENTS

The SPF position on the EEZ resulted in a number of fishing agreements between the US and several Pacific islands; as well as between the Soviet Union and Kiribati, and the Soviet Union and Vanuatu. Initially, while the US remained stalled in protracted multilateral negotiations with the Pacific islands, the Soviet Union surprised the region in August 1985 by signing a bilateral commercial treaty with Kiribati that allowed, for the first time,

the Soviet fishing fleet access to Kiribati's EEZ in exchange for US\$1.7 million annually. A similar fishing agreement costing US\$1.5 million annually was concluded with Vanuatu in January 1987, as a follow-up to the establishing of diplomatic relations in August 1986.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union also has the right for port facilities in Vanuatu for its fishing fleet.

Almost as an immediate response to the Soviet's moves, the US quickly concluded and signed in December 1986 a 5-year fishing treaty with fourteen of the island nations. Specifically, the agreement permitted the US tuna fleet to fish within the EEZs in return for US\$60 million in taxes over a 5-year period.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE SPNFZT

The decision of the US Government not to sign the three protocols to the SPNFZT has generated much protest among some countries in the region. With the exception of the US, the UK and France, the SPNFZT has won almost worldwide support. Many UN member countries, including the PRC and the Soviet Union, have signed the protocols to the Treaty. In essence, the Treaty contains sixteen items and three protocols, requesting the signatories to ban research, manufacture and possession of any nuclear weapons. It also includes a ban on nuclear testing, and dumping of nuclear waste in the South Pacific, whether on land or in the sea.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of foreign vessels carrying nuclear weapons or nuclear-powered ships entering any country's territory has been left to the discretion of the signatory. So far, Vanuatu, New

Zealand and the Solomon Islands have banned nuclear ships' visits. Tonga, on the other hand, has regarded nuclear testing as vital to Western security, and has resisted any attempts that would undermine that collective security.<sup>4</sup> In any case, this particular aspect of the Treaty has given rise to much friction over policy on security matters between the US and New Zealand.

#### RIFT IN THE ANZUS ALLIANCE

New Zealand's refusal in 1985 to allow US nuclear-ship visits has resulted in a rift in the ANZUS Treaty. The US reciprocated in August 1986 by suspending her treaty obligations to New Zealand, including the exchange of intelligence. The ANZUS crisis appeared to have undermined the credibility of the main regional security guarantee which has lasted uninterrupted since 1951. It also seemed to have eroded the confidence of the Pacific islands in the reliability of the US as a trusted friend and ally.<sup>5</sup>

#### FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTS

Regional sentiments against French nuclear tests in Mururoa in French Polynesia remained highly charged. The Treaty of Rarotonga was directed, in a sense, at French policy on nuclear testing in the Pacific which in turn had spawned the nuclear-free movement. The "Rainbow Warrior" incident between France and New Zealand symbolized the emotional regional concern over nuclear proliferation. But given the US Government tacit approval of French policy, France has not taken any action to compromise her

position. Tension between the countries in the region and France and the US has led to a gradual disenchantment with US policies in the region.<sup>6</sup>

#### MILITARY COUP IN FIJI

The one single event that appeared to have attracted the most attention came from the military coup in Fiji in May 1987. Following the elections of April 1987, the Fijian army turned against the coalition government of Dr. Bavadra and imposed a military government. The new regime appeared to have now reestablished and institutionalized the privileged position of the traditional ruling elite, mostly from the leaders of the eastern Confederacy.<sup>7</sup>

Regionally, the collapse of democratic government did not appear to have generated much concern beyond Australia and New Zealand. The region as a whole has somehow learned to come to terms with the new order in Fiji.<sup>8</sup> In fact, some members of the SPF seemed to have welcomed the resurgence in dominance by ethnic Melanesians in Fijian Politics. One notable example was Papua New Guinea which is predominantly Melanesian. However, there could be an undesirable long-term effect on the stability of the region because of the racial and undemocratic nature of the political process in Fiji. First, there would be no assurance that, in the future, other power groups or individuals would not challenge the present regime through violent and undemocratic means. Second, the Fijian experience could serve as a model for the Kanak separatist movement in French New Caledonia where indigenous

Melanesians, with material and training support from Libya, have long been pressing France for independence.

#### INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN NEW CALEDONIA

The independence movement in New Caledonia has resulted occasionally in violence and polarized the various racial groups in the territory. Although they make up 43 percent of the population, the Kanaks occupy only 15 percent of the habitable land and are, in effect, a minority in their own country. Though they form the largest ethnic group, they have been outmaneuvered in the politics of the independence issue. Virtually all non-Kanaks, comprised of French settlers, Asians and Polynesians, have opposed independence from France.<sup>9</sup>

In 1984, the French Government, for the first time, agreed to grant independence to the Kanaks. But for various reasons, a series of proposals on self-government was rejected by the Kanaks. They also boycotted a referendum on independence in September 1987. Violent clashes had sometimes taken place. The most recent outbreak occurred in May 1988 when an armed clash between Kanaks holding hostages and the French gendarmes resulted in twenty-one deaths. Since then, a compromise solution has been reached in June 1988 that would provide for a referendum on the independence question in 1998. Meanwhile, the territory has been broken up into three autonomous provinces; one for the white settlers who prefer being part of France, and two for the Kanaks. Beginning in July 1989, all three provinces would exercise internal self-government.<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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4. "Country Report: The South Pacific Grouping," Journal of Defense & Diplomacy, Vol. 6, No. 11, November 1988, p. 35.
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# CHAPTER III

## NATIONAL INTERESTS, GOALS AND TRENDS

### THE SPF

In spite of the recent political unrests in Fiji and New Caledonia, the SPF seemed to have been able to wield some form of political stability and cohesion among the South Pacific countries. At its 19th annual meeting in October 1988, the fifteen leaders described their talks as highly successful, with an "overwhelming concentration on practical issues" as Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke put it. The general consensus among the participants was that the Forum was heading into a new direction: that of addressing the immense economic and practical concerns of its members. Indeed, as expressed by Father Walter Lini, the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, they were hopeful that within a decade, the SPF could develop into a Pacific economic community. Beginning in 1989, countries such as France, Japan, the US, UK and Canada which have an interest in the region, would be invited as "dialogue partners" and be involved in post-session talks whenever necessary.<sup>1</sup>

### Organisational Changes

In line with the Forum's new economic focus, an overhaul of the regional institutional organisations has been undertaken, the purpose being to strengthen working arrangements and to avoid overlap in the work of the various regional institutions. Hence, the establishment of the South Pacific Organisation's Co-ordinating Committee (SPOCC). The South Pacific Bureau for

Economic Cooperation (SPEC) would now be known as the Forum Secretariat which would be restructured and a chief economist to be appointed. Within the Secretariat, a regional petroleum section would be set up to assist members in understanding the economics and pricing arrangements of the international petroleum market. The Secretariat would also recommend ways of boosting production and investment in the smaller island countries to help them benefit from the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperative Agreement (SPARTECA), under which the islands have free access to Australian and New Zealand markets.<sup>2</sup>

#### Economic Issues

The Secretariat has also studied a comprehensive list of proposals from the Committee on Regional Economic Issues (CREI), which was set up in 1987. Some of the issues needed political decisions from member governments; others required further dialogue with aid donor countries; while some were dealt with by the Secretariat. The recommendations to the Secretariat included the following: that it compile a guide on available sources of training; conduct a comprehensive review of agricultural and forestry sectors of Forum Island Countries (FICs); streamline possible aid coordination arrangements; approach Australia and New Zealand on employment schemes; assist FICs with policies on extra-regional trade; assist in resolving quarantine problems for FICs; assist FICs in preparation of development plans; provide advice on small-scale industries, businesses, co-operatives and joint venture schemes; and enhance the Secretariat's in-house



capability for economic research and analysis.<sup>3</sup> This exhaustive list suggests that the FICs are concerned about the long-term economic challenges that confront them and that they must find collective solutions which would strengthen their economic positions in their dealings with the other countries that have ties with the region.

#### The EEZ --- A Natural Resource

While nearly all the countries along the western rim of the Pacific have extensive shorelines, the small Pacific islands are completely surrounded by ocean. According to Norton S. Ginsberg, Director of the Environment and Policy Institute at the East-West Center in Hawaii, both are undergoing a transformation in the nature of their international relations. In the past, their territories usually included a declared narrow strip of three nautical miles of coastal water. However, in recent years, the changed concept of maritime ownership brought about by the UN Law of the Sea Convention has extended controls out to a 200-mile EEZ. Governments now have to include national maritime interests and "new boundaries" in their economic and diplomatic relationships with other countries. With few exceptions, most of the countries in the western Pacific, including the Soviet Union, Japan and the countries of the SPF, have extended their claim to maritime resources over a 200-mile EEZ. Countries in the western Pacific are now engaged in a "quest for the largest possible sea zones," in the view of Hanns J. Buchholz, professor of geography at Hannover University in West Germany, and author of a recent book on Pacific Ocean frontiers.<sup>4</sup>

For the FICs, the newly-acquired EEZs are regarded as vital to their economic survival. But they lack the capital, skills and other resources to develop and protect their maritime area by themselves. This has encouraged them to work more closely together and seek external assistance whenever necessary.<sup>5</sup>

The FICs' major worry, and therefore a challenge, is to ensure that the scramble by Asian and Pacific countries for the resources of the South Pacific is not done at their expense. However, this requires an ability to effectively apply their ownership or management rights to vast areas of ocean in respect of functions such as surveillance, pollution control and enforcement of fishing agreements. Fortunately for them, the SPF has already provided the regional infrastructure for collective action, resulting in efforts such as the 1986 SPNFZT; and the series of fishing agreements with the US and the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1987. It appears that the FICs' claim to jurisdiction of their EEZ have been respected by both the superpowers. However, the SPF remains concerned that Japan, which has the biggest fishing catch in the South Pacific, has been reluctant to begin formal discussions with the Forum Fisheries Agency on a multilateral fisheries arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

A significant problem lay in the island nations' maritime surveillance of their EEZs. An Australian Government program has already provided patrol craft to Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Western Samoa and the Solomon Islands. Australia has recently offered to extend the Pacific Patrol Boat program to the Federated States of Micronesia.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to assess the

effectiveness of the patrols by the respective island nations, but given the vast expanse of sea to be patrolled and the scarcity of boats, it is possible to speculate that, at best, the presence of the boats, in port or out at sea, can serve only as a deterrence. In short, it appears that the Pacific islands are not in a position to enforce their EEZs effectively. It would appear that diplomatic and political efforts are more useful in the long-term than mere police or military actions, given the limited capability of the island countries.

#### The SPF Future

The measures taken by the SPF with regard to the fishing agreements and the SPNFZT have generally brought positive results. More vigorous diplomatic actions seem necessary by the Forum, and Australia in particular, to steer the course forward for the South Pacific islands. Regional cohesion and cooperation are essential ingredients, as are efforts to secure and strengthen economic and other links to the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. The ANZUS alliance, in spite of the problems between New Zealand and the US, will probably continue to provide the broad security umbrella for the entire region. It is in the basic interest of the US as well as Australia that the FICs will achieve gradual economic progress within a free and stable South Pacific environment.

But will the SPF continue to be more pro-West or will it be more neutral and keep an equidistance from both East and West? The answer is a difficult one for a lot depends on how the big powers conduct themselves and the degree of cohesion that

Australia can exert over the Forum. Chances are that, if economics is the primary focus, the islands will be more neutral than pro-West. In any case, as the big powers jockey for influence in the region, the islands will face tremendous challenges in the years ahead.

#### AUSTRALIA

It is encouraging that Australia has publicly announced her strategic interest in the South Pacific on a number of occasions. In early 1987, the Australian Government formally adopted a new defence policy that included more defence responsibility for the Pacific islands than previously acknowledged. Defence Minister Kim Beazley, at about the same time, said that the RAN and RAAF would increase their presence in the South Pacific. RAN ships would deploy seventeen times in 1987, treble the previous rate, at the expense of longer cruises to such places as Japan and the western Indian Ocean. The RAAF would mount ten 5-day sorties with its P3C maritime patrol aircraft and would share any information collected with the countries concerned. Temporary basing of the P3Cs on some of the islands would be a regular feature. Defence aid to the island nations in FY 86-87 would amount to A\$14 million, almost matching the A\$19 million to South-east Asian countries. Beazley also said that they intended to extend to the South Pacific islands the same priority as they had given to their much more established defence relationships with the South-east Asian countries. He further cautioned that "an unfriendly maritime power in the area could inhibit our freedom of movement

through these approaches and could place in doubt the security of overseas supply to Australia of military equipment and other strategic material."8.

Clearly, Australia has both the will and the ability to influence the affairs of the South Pacific, to act as a stabilising force, and to deny any unfriendly power any influence in the region. As the acknowledged leader of the SPF, her foreign policies and leadership role will continue to be vital to the region's long-term development and stability, in particular, to exert pressure in restraining any country which steps out of line in the rush for ocean resources. But such measures should preferably be taken in concert with the friendly superpower --- the US.

#### UNITED STATES

As a Pacific power, the US has long-standing economic and security interests in the South Pacific since the eighteenth century. US strategic interests include promotion of regional security, protection of the sea lines of communication, and denial of the area to hostile powers.<sup>9</sup> However, a number of setbacks over the past few years appeared to have eroded her image and, to some extent, her influence in the eyes of the Pacific islands. There are four recent issues that have a bearing on US relations with the countries in the region. These are: US past policy on illegal fishing by the American tuna fleet; Washington's continued support for French Pacific Ocean policies; the ANZUS row with New Zealand; and the decolonisation of the

Micronesian Trust Territory. In all four instances, US attitude and policies have led to the impression that it has tended to interpret regional problems in the context of a superpower protecting its global interests rather than as a traditional friend of the islanders. Given the islands' sensitivity to the asymmetrical nature of their relationship with the US, it is not unexpected that they have been disillusioned over Washington's often high-handed manner in dealing with their regional problems.<sup>10</sup>

The tuna fishing dispute has already been resolved, at least till 1991 when the present 5-year agreement expires. As long as the Pacific islands are content with the amount received annually, there does not appear to be any obstacle in the continuation of the treaty after 1991. Of course, further negotiations are necessary but, the fundamentals having been ironed out in 1986, a new and amicable agreement can be expected in 1991, probably to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

The ANZUS dispute with New Zealand remains protracted. The US appeared to have sacrificed "a regional alliance in order to maintain a principle which it regards as having global significance."<sup>11</sup> It has long been assumed that ANZUS provided the regional security umbrella for the protection of the small island states. However, recent US policy towards New Zealand has cast some doubt on these assumptions. Some of the island countries are concerned that a loyal ally such as New Zealand could be dealt with in such a harsh manner; what would be the fate of a much smaller state, not so close to Washington, if it did not toe the

line?12

While the dust from the ANZUS rift has settled down somewhat, difficult long-term questions remain: can the alliance continue to provide the security and stability for the region; indeed, what is the purpose and value of ANZUS; will new security mechanisms be necessary; and will the Pacific islands seek elsewhere for their long-term protection, given their perception that the US cannot always be regarded as a reliable, equal and willing partner? These questions will require substantial reappraisal by US policy makers on their future relationship with the entire region.

Washington's policies over French activities in the South Pacific have also frustrated the region. The US continues to support French nuclear testing at Mururoa and appears to have condoned French colonialism in New Caledonia. Both these issues have been constantly brought up for censure at past meetings of the SPF. Despite the many requests from the SPF for assistance to bring about changes in France's policies, the US has preferred not to intervene.<sup>13</sup> Washington's decision not to sign the protocols to the SPNFZT, as enunciated by J. Stapleton Roy, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, was based on the conclusion that "under present circumstances the growing number of proposals for regional nuclear-free zones had the potential to undermine the policy of deterrence which has been the cornerstone of Western security since the end of World War II."<sup>14</sup> This US position is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future. Nor is there any evidence to

suggest that France will terminate its nuclear tests in the region. The SPF vision of a nuclear-free zone does not appear to be a reality on the horizon at this point in time.

### FRANCE

France's long-term interest in the region is centered on the continuance of its nuclear-test site in French Polynesia. Much diplomatic effort has been mounted in the past by France to demonstrate the need for the tests to support its deterrent nuclear strategy; as well as to dispute the various claims of the harmful effects on the environment resulting from the nuclear tests. As previously explained, continued US support for French Pacific nuclear policies will probably assure the French Polynesia possession in the foreseeable future. However, France seems to be concerned that the independence movement which had begun with Vanuatu's independence in 1980, and is now going on in New Caledonia, may cause a domino effect in its Pacific territories. The loss of these possessions may eventually include its nuclear test sites in Mururoa.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Western countries' fear that the Kanaks in New Caledonia will turn to the Left, in particular to Libya, has abated somewhat now that the UN decolonization committee is entrusted with overseeing the independence issue till 1998. However, there is no absolute guarantee that, in the future, an independent New Caledonia will not become embroiled in similar racial struggles between native Melanesians and French settlers, as happened in a once-democratic Fiji between Melanesians and



Indian settlers. For the moment, the main concern of the SPF is to allow the UN decolonization committee to do its work efficiently and fairly. France, as well as the US, would do well to lend its support to the endeavour and to show its impartiality in the entire self-determination process. Otherwise, the sincerity of the West may be suspect, offering unnecessary advantage to the Soviet Union.

#### SOVIET UNION

Soviet interest in the Asia-Pacific region has always been an important component of its global strategy.<sup>16</sup> Their policy has traditionally been based on military power. The Soviet Pacific Fleet is now the largest of its four and enjoys the advantage of operating from Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, from where it could interdict major sea lines of communications in a conflict. Gorbachev has now added political and economic dimensions to that policy. At his famous 1986 Vladivostok speech, he repeatedly stressed that the Soviet Union is also a Pacific nation, with vital and expanding national interests in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Ever since Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, Soviet diplomatic and political initiatives in the South Pacific have been cause for concern in the West. Diplomatic relations have been established with some of the islands. After many years of negotiation, the Soviet Union was permitted to establish an embassy in Papua New Guinea in 1988 -- the first permanent Soviet mission in the South Pacific islands. Apart from a number of agreements to fish in the islands' EEZs, the Soviet Union has

also been actively seeking landing rights for Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, as well as port facilities for its fishing fleet. These Soviet ventures have generated much anxiety in the West. The US, in particular, believed the fishing agreements are in reality a cover for Soviet clandestine activities.<sup>18</sup>

Soviet initiatives throughout the South Pacific are indicative of the increasing political, economic and military importance that they attach to the region. The Soviets obviously hope in the long term to have a greater influence in the region than they now have. For the foreseeable future, this trend in Soviet activities is likely to continue. So long as they do not appear to seriously breach the provisions of their agreements, chances are that their recent gains will be consolidated and new advantages will be acquired.

#### Libya

Libya, a Soviet client state, has also been fairly successful in increasing its presence in the region, much to the dismay of the US, Australia and New Zealand. It has been alleged that Libya has provided both financial and training support to the militants in the region, especially the Kanaks in New Caledonia. Political activists from Vanuatu have also been sent to Libya for paramilitary training.<sup>19</sup> Libyan activities in the region, whatever their form, can best be described as destabilising and generally contributing to a more comprehensive and longer-term Soviet strategy. There is good reason not to be optimistic about Libyan objectives in the region.

## CHINA AND JAPAN

In contrast to Soviet assertiveness and high profile, the two other Asian giants who have long-term interests in the region -- Japan and China -- are still feeling their way around the South Pacific. In early 1985, the then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone made a series of visits to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea to demonstrate Japanese interest in the economic development of the region. He had then spoken about Japanese willingness to respond positively to concrete initiatives from the countries concerned to give substance to the concept of Pacific Basin cooperation.<sup>20</sup> Again, in January 1987, the then Japanese Foreign Minister Tadashi Kuranari had emphasized the need for Japan to strengthen its South Pacific policy. However, the Japanese have made slow progress. For example, total Japanese trade with the region in 1987 amounted to a mere US\$1.3 billion, 0.3% of Japan's total trade. Opportunities for increased trade and investment also seem unattractive. On the other hand, there are signs that Japan has been asked to provide more aid to help in developing the region. Though the total Japanese aid given is a small amount, the total is increasing rapidly; in 1986, it grew by 127% to US\$55 million.

The main problem in formulating and coordinating Japanese policy is ignorance of the general character of the region and its problems. Aid missions have continually visited the Pacific islands and repeated the same basic questions each time. This cautiousness appears to guide the pattern of Japanese aid to the region. Moreover, the Japanese will probably continue to consult

with the more established aid donors such as Australia and New Zealand.<sup>21</sup>

Chinese interest in the South Pacific became apparent in April 1985 when the then Communist Party General Secretary, Hu Yaobang, launched a highly-publicized diplomatic sweep through the South Pacific, ostensibly to bring about increased acceptance of China as a friendly and constructive partner. Hu's itinerary included Australia, New Zealand, Western Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, the five countries in which the Chinese have diplomatic representations. Australian leaders at that time had welcomed China's interest in strengthening its links with her Pacific neighbours and had hoped that China's greater involvement would contribute to a more stable and prosperous region. In particular, Prime Minister Hawke had stressed the increased potential for export of Australian commodities to the huge Chinese market.<sup>22</sup> However, although increased trade and investment have marked Chinese-Australian relations, Chinese contact with the rest of the South Pacific remains insignificant.

On the other hand, China has signed Protocols Two and Three of the SPNFZT in February 1987. The Chinese Ambassador to Fiji, Ji Chaozhu, did the signing and read a statement on behalf of the Chinese Government. The statement announced that China respected the status of the South Pacific nuclear-free zone and would not use or threaten to use or test nuclear weapons in the region; however, China reserved the right to reconsider their obligations if other nuclear powers or signatories to the treaty took any action in violation of the provisions of the treaty. The

statement further stressed that countries in possession of large nuclear arsenals bore a special responsibility to make the South Pacific a real nuclear-free zone.<sup>23</sup> It does appear that present Chinese influence has a relatively small impact on the South Pacific islands, both politically and economically. As a Pacific power, it is to be expected that China would have a keen and long-term interest in the region, but it would be a long time more before the Chinese presence is strongly felt in the region.

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23. "China Signs Two Protocols," Beijing Review, No. 8, 23 February 1987, p. 10.

## CHAPTER IV

### ASEAN PARTICIPATION

It is only in the past decade that ASEAN has developed into a more cohesive regional organisation. Much of the impetus came from the need to have a common position over the Kampuchean issue. There has also been some progress over the lowering and removal of trade tariffs for some products. ASEAN today is a long way from a military alliance such as NATO or a common market such as the EEC, and perhaps will never be so. There are also a number of long-standing divisive issues among the ASEAN countries that have obstructed a closer union. Nonetheless, the concept of ASEAN as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality (ZOPFAN) has generally been well established and recognised internationally. Indeed, the political stability promoted, to some extent, by the ZOPFAN concept has provided many years of impressive economic growth in the region, especially in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Given its political stability and economic achievements, ASEAN as a bloc can serve as a role model and make a direct and significant contribution to the development of the islands in the South Pacific. The ASEAN objective must be, in the long-term, to see that the entire South Pacific will remain a peaceful, free and economically viable region. A conflict-ridden South Pacific will have an adverse impact on South-east Asia, both politically, economically and psychologically.

## A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

### ZOPFAN and the SPNFZ

In principle, ASEAN can and should work more closely through the various organisations of the SPF on all major political matters. Although close bilateral ties presently exist between individual countries of ASEAN and some of the Pacific island states, it will be in the long-term interest of both organisations to have a broad understanding on the fundamental issues. The ASEAN ZOPFAN concept can be expounded to the SPF because there exist sentiments within the SPF favouring a lesser reliance on the Western security umbrella and a more independent and neutral stand on global affairs. Indeed, the SPNFZT has ideological resemblance to the ZOPFAN idea --- a politically stable region, comprised of independent and free states; and essentially nuclear-free or, put another way, based on avoidance of conflict in the region through involvement with the super powers.

Presently, South-east Asia and the South Pacific, for all intents and purposes, are both very much oriented towards the US and the West, based on the ANZUS Treaty, the FPDA, and the Manila Pact. However, this does not mean that the SPF and ASEAN cannot jointly pursue a more independent and neutral stance in world affairs. This is one area in which each can inspire and support the other diplomatically in international forums.

### Building-up Rapport

Building permanent and strong bridges of contact will be



mutually beneficial to both regions. Ideas on neutrality and nuclear-free zones have always been popular topics of discussion in diplomatic circles among the Third World countries. Furthermore, there are usually more reasons for agreements than disagreements on such issues. Rapport between ASEAN and the SPF can thus be more easily cultivated through agreeing on common positions on neutrality and nuclear-free zones.

The countries of ASEAN can also attempt to build up rapport through the more established political links. For instance, both Singapore and Malaysia could use the services of Australia and New Zealand; and Indonesia could go through Papua New Guinea and Australia. The principle to follow is to recognise that the wheel need not be re-invented and that both Australia and New Zealand are useful channels for continuing contacts. In Indonesia's case, the existing friction with Australia and Papua New Guinea may pose some difficulties; however, trying to circumvent them may only lead to more suspicion and rejection.

#### Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

It is important, too, for ASEAN as a body to openly show its respect and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the small Pacific island states, in particular their long-standing concern over intrusions into their EEZs. The island nations have demonstrated their reasonableness and pragmatism as far as their economic needs are concerned, as exemplified by the fishing agreements with both the US and the Soviet Union. Open declaration of support for their EEZs and, therefore, their territorial rights will win for the ASEAN countries many friends

among the islands.

#### Avoidance of Internal Conflicts

On the other hand, ASEAN should avoid getting involved in the internal problems of Fiji, New Caledonia or Vanuatu. Beyond calling for recognition of basic human rights principles and the need for preservation of parliamentary democracy, ASEAN countries would do well to remain prudent and silent. The racial issues within the countries concerned are far too localized and entrenched for any outside interference to have any useful impact. Melanesians are now beginning to assert themselves both politically and economically. It may be best in the long-term that they are encouraged to make their own judgements and look for compromises to suit their own peculiar circumstances, without any external interference.

### DEFENCE AND SECURITY MATTERS

#### Protecting the EEZs

The islands' major threat perception is based on violations of their EEZs and their inability to conduct effective maritime surveillance. The patrol boat programme undertaken by the Australians has given some of them an independent capability to patrol their own waters. Also, RAN and RAAF deployments and the resultant intelligence have probably contributed to a more effective deterrence from intrusions into the EEZs. However, distances are long and communications will always remain a problem. There is a limit to what the islands individually or collectively can do. Much will continue to depend on aid and

military deployments from Australia and New Zealand.

There is also a limit to ASEAN's contribution to the various measures to enhance protection of the EEZs. But ASEAN can help to give added confidence to the islands. Assistance may include the following: first, ASEAN countries themselves need to observe the EEZs; second, support to the boat programmes can take the form of training of the operators to man the patrols such as police or maritime forces, and custom and immigration officers; and third, port facilities can be developed or upgraded, both for military and commercial uses. Beyond this limited support, there is very little else that ASEAN as a bloc can physically do. However, the psychological impact of ASEAN's contribution will be far more important in the eyes of the Pacific islands in that it will demonstrate ASEAN's sincerity and concern for their problems.

#### Security Forces

The Pacific islands do not have much in the way of military forces to speak of, with the exception of Papua New Guinea and Fiji, and the French gendarmes in New Caledonia. In fact, there is very little need for military forces since some form of paramilitary forces are all that are needed for internal security duties. Still, such forces need to be trained, equipped and sustained. It may not be wise for the ASEAN countries to get deeply involved with such requirements since Australia already has many defence aid programmes in existence. However, assistance in training of police personnel in primarily civic duties such as crime prevention, immigration controls, customs inspections,

traffic control, and quelling of civil disturbances can and should be offered. These are in fact also the areas which the SPF is currently looking into.

#### External Security Dependence on Australia and ANZUS

As the main stabilising force in the region, much is expected of Australia to provide broad security for the islands. In this respect, the ANZUS Treaty draws in the US in the event of a major threat to the region. Given the US past and present interests in the region, any serious attempts by any external power source to gain influence through unfair or violent means will most likely be countered by a strong US military response. It is to ASEAN's interest to encourage the continuance of a healthy ANZUS alliance, especially a possible and early reconciliation between New Zealand and the US. This will be somewhat of a dilemma as support of the SPNFZT implies support of New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation and rejection of US policies. Nevertheless, ASEAN countries should remember that US presence in South-east Asia has generally provided stable conditions for economic and social development in their countries. A strong Western influence will be much more preferred to a weak one, a situation which will deny the Soviets the opportunity to pursue for their long-term motives of communist domination.

#### Monitoring of Insurgencies

The Kanak independence movement should be watched closely, particularly the activities of Libya. The ASEAN countries, as a

rule, should not get involved since the UN decolonisation committee is already taking charge. However, it ought to be recognised that Libyan involvement in the region is a destabilising factor, given its past record of terrorism and subversion elsewhere in the world. Moreover, there is ample turbulence and unrest in a number of domestic political situations for them to exploit. Such opportunities are not confined to New Caledonia but include many other parts of Melanesia and Polynesia such as Fiji and Vanuatu. ASEAN would do well, too, to be impartial in the disputes between the various groups in these countries, except where the insurgents are clearly communists or religious extremists in inclination.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As a region, the South Pacific islands are already receiving the highest per capita foreign aid in the world. Aid donors including Japan, the US, Australia and New Zealand have been generous and chances are that such aid will continue unabated. It is, therefore, pointless and unnecessary for ASEAN to contribute to any aid programmes. In any case, there is also a limit to what the developing ASEAN countries can do financially, compared to the present aid donors.

#### Promotion of Trade and Investments

A viable approach is to promote greater trade between the Pacific islands and ASEAN. Granted that they cannot offer any products which the ASEAN countries do not produce themselves; but

given the economic focus of the island states, there should be ample opportunities for closer trading ties. The ASEAN countries are also well located strategically to take advantage of the lower cost of shipping.

The major economic development needs have already been identified by the Committee on Regional Issues (CREI). ASEAN countries should take these up and assess where assistance and investments can be made on a long-term basis in such areas as forestry and agricultural production, joint venture schemes, and small-scale industries. Wherever applicable, advice may be given on any aspect of market research and assessment as well as in development of long-range economic plans. ASEAN governments should take the lead in such enterprises and not leave it in the hands of private entrepreneurs who may not appreciate the global picture but assess their businesses purely on economic terms.

#### Tourism

There appears to be much potential for development of the tourist industry, especially for New Caledonia, Fiji and Vanuatu. This can be encouraged among ASEAN private entrepreneurs involved in the tourist trade. Some of the existing Japanese tourist dollars presently spent in Australia and New Zealand can be channeled to these countries. Given better communications and transportation means, the Pacific islands can benefit greatly from the fast-growing Asian-Pacific tourist industry.

#### Other Development Needs

There are many other development needs in which ASEAN can

contribute. Of course, Australia, New Zealand and other aid donors are already doing a lot. But there is no reason why the ASEAN countries cannot play a part as well. Areas in which assistance may be given include courses in public administration, education, health services, and public utilities. Development of port and airport facilities, as well as public housing may also be considered. The experience of the ASEAN countries can be very useful developmental models for the undeveloped Pacific islands, compared to the assistance of the more developed nations.

#### A SINGAPORE CONTRIBUTION

Singapore has the advantage of being small, with a highly-developed physical infrastructure and a Western-style democracy. Most of government administration and business is conducted in the English language. These stand her in good stead in developing a solid political and economic relationship with the Pacific islands. Moreover, Singapore has extremely close ties with Australia and New Zealand. In fact, the Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew made a 19-day visit to New Zealand, Fiji and Australia in November 1988 to further cement the warm ties enjoyed with these nations. In each of these countries, he discussed both bilateral, regional and international issues with his respective counterparts, much of which were focused on economic matters.<sup>1</sup>

Much of what has already been suggested in the preceding paragraphs can be applied to Singapore. Her success in the various areas of national development can set an example for the

Pacific islands to follow. They need to plug into the Asia-Pacific grid to become economically viable. Singapore's experience and expertise in getting onto the world economic grid will be of tremendous help in developing the economies of the islands. Furthermore, the agricultural economies of the islands are not in competition with Singapore's economy, as compared to the other ASEAN countries which still depend a lot on commodities export in their economies.

However, care has to be exercised to ensure that such assistance is carried out through the organisations of the SPF, at least initially, till solid foundations for the support have been established. Singapore should also use the services of Australia and New Zealand. The bonds and economic relationships that will be built up should have a lasting value and should not be seen as a one-time business deal for profit purposes. It will be to Singapore's long-term benefit in the region to tread carefully, to be sensitive to the wishes and aspirations of the islands, and to adopt a participatory and sincere approach.

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

On balance, the general picture of the South Pacific in the foreseeable future is a rather reassuring one, so long as the SPF, and Australia especially, is able to wield some form of a regional consensus, and the present problems with the ANZUS Treaty do not get worse. But the region needs to come to terms with its SPNFZ policy. Having the Treaty signed by many countries does not mean the end of big power competition and influence in the region. Moreover, the US, together with France, has refused to sign the Protocols to the Treaty. As a general expression of the aspirations of the region for peace and freedom, the SPNFZT is an excellent example of regional and diplomatic cooperation, as is the ASEAN ZOPFAN concept. But this is as far as expectations should go. A flexible and more reasonable approach should also be adopted in permitting the port visits of nuclear-powered ships or vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

The ASEAN countries would do well to demonstrate their diplomatic support for the general aspiration of the region for a conflict-free and stable area, comprised of independent and free states. More direct and enduring contacts should be established with the region, particularly with the island nations. However, ASEAN should avoid getting entangled in the internal problems of the islands, such as in Fiji or New Caledonia.

The vision of a South Pacific economic community is not a far-fetched one. The importance of the EEZs to the islands need not be over-stressed. Given this economic focus, the countries of

ASEAN are well-positioned to play a constructive role in the development of the region. They should adopt a participatory and mutually beneficial approach in contributing to the economic development of the region. Trade, tourism and investment in appropriate businesses can be promoted through ASEAN governments' leadership. Assistance may also be given in other areas of national development such as health services and education. In all these endeavours, Singapore can make much useful contribution. However, no concrete recommendations will be made as these are beyond the scope of this paper.

What benefits can Singapore derive from being involved with the politics and economics of the South Pacific? The economic gains are inconsequential as the markets will forever remain small compared to the markets worldwide. The main advantage will be the continuance of a stable and conflict-free region adjacent to South-east Asia, and this will in turn contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous South-east Asia. The ASEAN nations need to understand this goal as clearly as the countries of the South Pacific need to appreciate this common destiny.

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